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THE SUPERVISION OF SOLICITATION OF FUNDS FOR WAR RELIEF

BY DOROTHY POPE,
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War relief meant to America, from 1914 to 1917, an outpouring of sympathy and generosity, expressed in financial support for the relief of the suffering civilians of the warring countries of Europe and Asia Minor. Now, in the midst of our participation in the war, the term has broadened to include provision for relief of our own civilian population affected by the war, and provision for the comfort and well-being of our soldiers here and abroad. Relief for Europe is now, as before, provided through our official war relief organization—the American Red Cross—and also through the numerous voluntary war relief organizations which have sprung into being to meet the war needs of Europe. The American Red Cross has also assumed the relief of the families of soldiers and sailors as an additional burden. To provide for our soldiers, the Commissions on Training Camp Activities of the War and Navy Departments, officially recognize six national voluntary organizations. The money needed for the support of the excellent work of these organizations, which are doing so much to maintain the morale of our army, is an entirely new responsibility willingly accepted since our entrance into the war.

The American people have risen to meet these new demands with generosity, but our continued participation in the war makes it apparent that the burden of relief and provision for our soldiers cannot be borne by any fraction of our populace. It must be borne by every individual citizen according to his means. In addition, we can support the financial strain of the war only if we practise economy far beyond our custom. As liberty loan follows liberty loan, economy in the expenditure of money becomes more and more necessary; as thousands after thousands of our young men train for the army and leave for France, economy in the use of men and human effort becomes imperative; and economy of time accompanies the economy of money and effort.

This economy is as necessary in the collection and disbursement of funds as in all other fields of war activity.

The two essentials, therefore, in providing for war relief are economy of time, effort and money, and sharing of the burden by every citizen of the United States. It is evident that to meet these demands of our crisis, we must discard the hit or miss method we have hitherto used to collect our funds and adopt centralized control on a nation-wide basis.

STATE COUNCILS OF DEFENSE

The state councils of defense are the only official war organizations operating in the states, which are charged with no single field of endeavor but with the mobilization of the time, efforts and money of the citizens of the states in active support of the war and the centralization and coördination of the war work in the states. Their membership represents the activities, resources and industries of the state, and they are both state and national in character. Though of such size that they can effectively determine the merit of the objects of the various war relief organizations and of the work which they are doing, they operate in a jurisdiction so small that they can effectively observe and supervise the methods of solicitation which these various agencies employ within their jurisdiction. Their extensive machinery, which extends through the county and school district, affords an admirable means of making supervision by them effective. They are thus the logical organization for the supervision of solicitation of funds for war relief purposes.

On December 7, 1917, the Council of National Defense, in a formal resolution, officially requested the state councils to assume the responsibility for exercising this supervision in their respective states, by adopting some system of supervision of such appeals, which "would encourage the patriotic and philanthropic spirit of the country to a generous response, by the assurance of the proper responsibility of those soliciting subscriptions, thus minimizing opportunities to exploit the benevolent impulses of the country," and as a means of so doing to investigate and approve of organizations which seem after investigation worthy of support. Model forms of the investigation of war relief organizations, compiled by the Council of National Defense from forms in use by private organizations, which investigate organizations collecting funds for

war relief, were transmitted to the state councils of defense with the suggestion that they make a state list of approved organizations.

The Council of National Defense further requested that all campaigns for private aid be conducted in entire coöperation with the state councils of defense. In pursuance of this request, voluntary relief organizations have been consistently requested to communicate with the state councils of defense before undertaking the collection of funds within the states.

STATE COUNCIL LISTS OF APPROVED AGENCIES

By June, 1918, forty-two state councils of defense had reported to the Council of National Defense that they had assumed responsibility for the supervision of the solicitation of funds. The action taken varies in the different states. In accordance with the suggestion of the Council of National Defense, nineteen state councils¹ had at that time prepared a list of approved agencies. This list is available only in the state council offices in some states, while in others it has been given wide publicity with a warning to people to give only to the organizations listed. Eight state councils² had issued permits to agents of approved organizations for presentation when soliciting funds. Four³ of these had been empowered by act of legislature to control the solicitation of funds by compelling the licensing of all organizations authorized to collect funds within the state. In other states similar legislation has been discussed but not passed as yet. Several state councils, in addition, have been expressly empowered by statute creating them to promulgate mandatory orders relating to their general purpose of providing for the security and welfare of the state during the war, and this power would seem capable of use to make compulsory the licensing of societies soliciting funds. The North Dakota Council of Defense is using such power for this purpose.

The final decision as to the societies to be endorsed rests entirely with the state councils of defense. The American Red Cross only

¹ Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia and Washington.

² Illinois, Indiana, Montana, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota and Vermont.

³ Illinois, Montana, South Carolina and South Dakota.

has been endorsed by the Council of National Defense. Six organizations working directly under the Commission on Training Camp Activities—the Y. M. C. A., Y. W. C. A., the Knights of Columbus, the Jewish Welfare Board, the American Library Association, and the War Camp Community Service—have been endorsed by that commission. In making up their list of approved organizations, some state councils of defense have considered not only the reliability of an organization, but also whether or not it duplicates existing work.

STATE AND LOCAL PLANS

In several of the forty-two states, where state councils have assumed responsibility for this work, they have considered methods of distribution as well as collection. Some have adopted on a state wide scale—others have allowed local communities to adopt—schemes providing for centralized collection and disbursement of funds.

The Illinois State Council, specially charged by state statute with the responsibility of licensing war relief organizations and supervising the collection of funds by such organizations through the state, early instructed each county council of defense in the state to organize a county finance committee which should undertake the financial campaigns for that county as they came along. The state council did not prescribe the exact form which the county finance committee should take, but issued a license to each county which adopted a plan satisfactory to the state council.

Among the most interesting and satisfactory plans which have thus developed in the state of Illinois are the plans of Vermillion and Mercer Counties, both of which provide permanent machinery to collect funds for the American Red Cross and the other agencies which conduct national campaigns. This machinery consists of a permanent committee in each township with subcommittees in each small district. These committees can be instantly mobilized for each drive as it is announced, to collect from each individual his share of the quota assigned. The county finance committee allots to each township its per cent of the county quota. A permanent card record of each contributor and the amount he or she subscribes for each call is kept on file.

In Mercer County each person is given by the town committee a

permanent rating as a gage of what he ought to give and will be asked to give in each drive. The county quota is subdivided on a basis of 120 per cent, the extra 20 per cent allowing for deflection by an individual from his assigned quota, and the surplus going toward county council of defense expenses or toward the quota for the next drive. In both counties only the exact quota for each drive is paid to the organization for whose benefit the drive is conducted. Neither of these plans provides for the centralized control of the smaller relief organizations.

A plan has developed among the local councils of many states which provides for far more sweeping control of both the collection and disbursement of funds than do the plans of the Illinois counties. This is the war chest. Under the war chest, a community committee undertakes the collection and disbursement of funds for all war relief, including the recognized national organizations and it disburses funds according to the assigned national quotas, or, in the absence of a national quota, in as just a manner as possible. Although the form of war chest varies considerably in different communities, its essentials are the same in all.

A war chest committee of leading citizens of a county or town is appointed, usually under the local council of defense, to take charge of the systematic collection and distribution of funds for war relief, to all organizations to which the committee decides to give. The force of popular opinion is employed to prevent direct solicitation of funds for war relief in the county or town, but the individual is allowed to prescribe the causes which his money is to support. One object of the chest is to collect money from as nearly as possible every individual of the community. The money is either collected in one drive at a specific time or is collected in weekly or monthly pledges made by members of the community. Where a pledge system is used, the amount of the pledge is sometimes stated as a percentage basis of the wages of the person pledging.

As in the adoption of any new plan, there have been ardent supporters and bitter opponents of the war chest idea. A recent list of the towns collecting funds on the war chest plan, shows that the plan has gotten a foothold in one or more municipalities or localities in thirty-six states. Five⁴ state councils of defense have definitely endorsed the war chest plan and have recommended its

⁴ Michigan, New Mexico, New York, Washington and Wisconsin.

adoption in the counties in their states. Four⁵ state councils are at present considering its advisability. On the other hand, four⁶ state councils have disapproved this plan for collecting funds. The Commercial Relations Committee of the Connecticut State Council, which has recently made a thorough study of the war chest, in a preliminary report states that among the cities visited, or corresponded with, they found that none of those which had adopted the war chest plan desired to give it up. The degree of success, however, of the war chest seems largely dependent upon the care and preparation that has been given to the working out of the plan.

The Council of National Defense has not taken any action upon the development of the war chest plan in the several states. It confines its request to the establishment of some system of adequate centralized supervision under each state council of defense; it suggests as a means to this end the careful preparation and wide publication of a list of approved societies, and leaves the further details to be worked out by the state councils themselves.

State councils of defense, following out the request of the Council of National Defense, are endeavoring to bring about in their several states a supervision of funds for war relief which will aid the nation by providing for the economy and conservation of its resources at this time when economy is so vital, and will insure adequate support to organizations doing efficient and essential work. Their supervision aims also to protect their citizens from fraud and from constant, petty and irritating solicitation and to insure thereby their continued generosity, upon which adequate support of war relief depends. With the progress of the war, the need for effective supervision of solicitation for war relief, just as the need of relief itself, becomes increasingly vital. This supervision depends for its success upon the coöperation of the individual citizen and of the war relief agencies concerned with the state councils of defense.

⁵ Connecticut, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Utah.

⁶ Illinois, Massachusetts, Tennessee and Virginia.